

**Written Testimony of**

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**Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**

**“Setting New Foundations: Implementing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for  
Native Communities.”**

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Miiyuyum (Hello), and good afternoon Chairman Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski, and Members of the Committee. On behalf of Assistant Secretary Alan Davidson, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify about the National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s (NTIA) work on the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. My name is Adam Geisler. I am an enrolled member of the La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians and speaking to you today from the ancestral homelands of the Payómkawichum people where I reside and work. I currently serve in a career position as the Division Chief of the Tribal Connectivity and Nation to Nation Coordination Division within the Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth at NTIA where I assumed the newly formed leadership position in the fall of 2021.

Living and working from my own indigenous community, I experience the same challenges that many individuals within different indigenous communities face when it comes to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet access. My own community has struggled over the past two years in addressing remote education, telehealth, and even remote governance. Broadband is no longer a luxury but a necessity, which I know every member of this committee recognizes.

I served three terms and dedicated nearly a decade of my life as an elected tribal leader of the La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians. I have long worked toward addressing disparities within my own community, including but—not limited to—broadband and emergency communications. I, therefore, was thrilled when Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 creating the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, knowing that it would begin to address the broadband and digital divide needs of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities in a way that fits their individual needs and circumstances.

This program has created a new opportunity for partnership between our communities and broadband providers. The approach that the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program allows us to take is that of working directly with tribal governments, Alaska Native Corporations, Tribal Colleges and Universities, tribal organizations, and the Department of Hawaiian Homelands on solutions that they have put forward and is a first of its kind for the targeted deployment of broadband in tribal communities.

NTIA hosted multiple Tribal Consultations and listening sessions to inform the development of the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program Notice of Funding Opportunity prior to its release on June 3, 2021. This critical step helped NTIA better understand the unique needs of tribes, and that understanding informed the development of the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

After the release of the Notice of Funding Opportunity, NTIA held 10 national webinars, participated in 55 national and regional engagements and technical assistance workshops, and our staff directly contacted over 350 tribal governments known to be without qualifying broadband service, twice, to ensure awareness of the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. The outreach and technical assistance were conducted virtually in the middle of an unprecedented global pandemic. Undertaking such a substantial outreach campaign to Tribal communities was key to ensuring that all eligible Tribal entities were aware of the funding opportunity and how to prepare for it. It also is significant that the outreach was conducted by an entirely Native team working for NTIA on the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. Each member of my team understands and has lived the realities of the digital divide in their home communities. They are all well equipped to recognize and help address the digital equity challenges faced by applicants to the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program.

NTIA staff have worked hard to launch this program, process applications, and award grants. This process has included multiple back-and-forths between NTIA staff and Tribal applicants to address questions. I remind myself and my team that this program was intended to help those in greatest need obtain access to qualifying broadband service. Our job is not just funding broadband projects. We are building the capacity of Indian Country, one applicant at a time. The broadband deployment projects funded by the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program will build the infrastructure necessary for tens of thousands of Tribal members to reliably access the internet. The use and adoption projects the program funds will provide Tribal members the devices, skills and broadband services they need to engage in remote learning, remote work, precision agriculture, telemedicine, and in every other way become full digital citizens. The work we are doing to make sure the applications are complete is not always fast but is invaluable to the stakeholders and to the interest of all Americans who have invested in their success.

Over 450 tribal governments applied for grants, which constitutes roughly 75% of the 574 federally recognized tribes, with Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program applicants demonstrating a need to connect at least 180,000 indigenous unserved households. The original Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program was nearly six times oversubscribed with a total of \$5.84 billion in requested funding for projects and only \$980 million available to address the challenge.

To date, NTIA has awarded \$6.5 million in grants to 15 eligible Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program applicants. Today, NTIA announced an additional 19 awards —totaling nearly \$77 million—in funding going toward broadband adoption and use activities for Tribes in 10 states. We are working to award the remaining funds as quickly as possible.

NTIA also is working to deploy the additional \$2 billion in Tribal funding as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. We have conducted two Tribal consultations regarding

how this funding should be deployed and plan to conduct additional Tribal Consultations prior to releasing a Notice of Funding Opportunity. Consistent with the statute, NTIA is also evaluating the possibility of allocating some of the new \$2 billion in tribal funding toward qualifying projects under the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program round 1 Notice of Funding Opportunity.

This program is life changing for so many Tribal communities.

In conclusion, Chairman Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. I look forward to answering any questions you may have regarding the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program.